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ABSTRACT

Several key elements for the internationalization of American business administration education programs are outlined, including tools for: helping one monitor the dynamic and interdependent global business environment, honing one's sensitivity to cultural differences, and sharpening one's language and communication skills. Strategies are suggested for strengthening the international dimension of the curriculum. Proposals advanced include adaptation and modification of foreign language instruction and materials, a multi-disciplinary approach to the heightening of cross-cultural awareness, a comparative management approach to integrating international dimensions into business school courses, and augmentation of pedagogical methods through a thematic focus and various experiential opportunities. (Author/MSE)

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INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL: THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Toward Internationalization: Strategies for Strengthening Business Education (Abstract)

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While many have called for revision of business school curricula to incorporate an international dimension, there has been an uneven pattern of institutional reaction, ranging from token response to full commitment. This paper reviews the reasons for internationalization from a different perspective by emphasizing perceived value to business students pursuing professionally-oriented education. In particular, since business students tend to be highly motivated toward the achievement of success in their careers, they quickly grasp the importance of elements of their education which can be shown to have a utility when applied in the workplace.

Several key elements for internationalization are outlined in the paper, including tools for monitoring the dynamic and interdependent global business environment, sensitivity to cultural differences, and sharpened language and communications skills. The balance of the paper puts forth suggested strategies to assist business schools in strengthening the international dimension of the curriculum. The proposals advanced include adaptation and modification of foreign language instruction and materials; a multi-disciplinary approach to the heightening of cross-cultural awareness; a comparative management philosophy in integrating international dimensions into business school courses; and augmentation of pedagogical methods through a thematic focus and various experiential opportunities.

Toward Internationalization: Strategies for Strengthening Business Education

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It has now been over a decade since the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the principal accrediting organization for business education in the U.S., began expecting its members to incorporate international dimensions in their programs. From the outset, there was no common agreement as to how the new standard should be met. Indeed, the AACSB's current statement provides wide latitude: "There is no intention that any single approach is required to satisfy the worldwide dimension of the Curriculum Standard, but every student should be exposed to the international dimension through one or more elements of the curriculum" (28). This flexibility of response, while perhaps desirable, has led to a tendency to treat the international dimension as an afterthought, relegated to the last chapter of a textbook or toward the end of a course syllabus. In short, the topic all too often becomes trivialized or handled as readily dispensable in case of insufficient time or interest.

Underlying the AACSB's important stimulus toward internationalizing the curriculum was an understanding of the reality of interdependency among nations and the implications of such interconnectedness for leaders of business. Since many business students, particularly in the United States, tend to be relatively parochial in their experience and view of the world beyond the domestic scene, universities have an obligation to

challenge myopic perspectives by addressing worldwide concerns in the curriculum. This attention must not be limited to a few splashy externally-oriented activities; rather, it should permeate the core courses of the business school.

Since business students are generally highly motivated toward the achievement of success in their careers, they quickly grasp the importance of monitoring the uncontrollable factors which constitute the elements of the overall business environment. In other words, the dynamics of the international scene become more meaningful when students recognize that no manager--foreign or domestic--can afford to ignore the implications of interdependence and change.

To be effective in an ever-shifting world, a manager needs to hone skills, develop sensitivities, and sharpen communications tools. In terms of basic skills development, the business school must assure that graduates have complete preparation in the core fields comprising the "common body of knowledge" and, frequently, in a specialization among the functional areas (e.g., accounting, finance or marketing). Part of the foundation prerequisite preparation should include macro-economics, including essential concepts and theories of international trade.

Students should be shown how to monitor the business environment--that is, to consider the implications for decision-makers of change in economic conditions, social and cultural dynamics, technological progress, the legal and political situation, and so on. For example, managers operate increasingly in a multi-cultural context. Thus, sensitivity to

cultural differences is valuable in both domestic and international business. As Wind notes, "a manager in the turbulent international environment must not only be a skilled professional, he must also carry with him a deep realization of cultural diversity and the capacity to adjust his skills and strategies accordingly" (2).

Managers are principally communicators, in that they spend most of their time interacting with others in order to get tasks accomplished. Thus, business schools can facilitate management development by providing tools for effective communication. For purposes of international business, an understanding of cross-cultural communication and of non-verbal interaction is particularly critical. Enhanced sophistication of communications for the international setting should tend to influence positively the degree of sensitivity to cultural differences as well. Among the communications tools of greatest relevance for international business are foreign language competence, public speaking abilities, active listening skills, and acceptance of interpersonal differences.

To summarize, the principal outcomes of management education broadened to incorporate the worldwide dimension should include comprehensive knowledge of core subject matter, an ability to monitor the international business environment, and effective communications skills, particularly in a cross-cultural context.

Strengthening the International Dimension: Suggested Strategies

1. Foreign languages

Facility in foreign languages is immensely helpful to the successful conduct of international business. For example, an understanding of subtleties of meaning can influence the dynamics of negotiation.

Similarly, a social rapport, which can be more readily established through foreign language competence, is a necessary foundation of many business relationships.

Foreign language study helps business students strengthen their communications skills in their native language as well, since it focuses attention on structure, precision, and accuracy of usage. With heightened confidence through language acquisition, the graduate will be more likely to establish effective business relationships. Also, language capability provides access to key business information sources. Prior language study increases the probability of accurate communication of an intended message between sender and receiver. Yet another advantage of foreign language training for the business setting is that it generates an opportunity for a greatly expanded network of professional contacts.

Unfortunately, foreign language courses at the university level fail to attract and maintain the interest of many business students. The principal reasons for this condition seem to revolve around a perception among students that foreign language courses do not offer an immediately discernible utility. As traditionally offered, foreign language courses follow a rather dry "building block" approach through which grammatical understanding is gradually built. Conversational uses are generally minimized and subsequent courses tend to emphasize the literary tradition of the language.

In keeping with the movement toward "foreign language for special purposes", the increased interest in internationalizing the business school might give added impetus to the further development of "foreign language for business purposes". Rather than relegating this new area

simply to a separate, advanced course in specialized commercial vocabulary, it should instead become a critical focus within a redesign of introductory-level work in the language. By using pertinent business examples and illustrations from the outset, the business student will be able to grasp the immediate applicability of the language. Some progressive foreign language departments have already embraced this notion and it may be expected to become more widely adopted as appropriate teaching materials become available.

For some students, an intensive mode of foreign language learning will be far more effective than a more leisurely, traditional-length course format. This is particularly true for management development programs for practicing executives. Intensity provides students an opportunity to become immersed in the target language with a minimal amount of interference caused by distraction of time between sessions. Furthermore, intensive courses may facilitate the student's development of cultural awareness since they may be ideal settings in which to demonstrate cultural misunderstanding.

Because business students are often keenly competitive, they may be fearful of not performing well in foreign language courses. By using the same techniques of simulation and role-playing which are often employed in the business school, foreign language faculty may find greater success with such students. In one variation of this situation, each class participant could be permitted to select a new identity. For example, John Jones, a senior interested in international finance, could become (during his French class) Pierre Colbin, a banker for Crédit Lyonnais. In like fashion, all the other students (and even the professor) could choose

a different persona. Under such circumstances, a positive atmosphere would be created in which the student would be less likely to be worried about making mistakes, and would thus become more receptive to language learning.

Materials should be selected which are topical and relevant to the contemporary cultures of those host nations where the target language is spoken today. Ideally, foreign language textbooks should contain lively, up-to-date, and pertinent information and illustrations concerning business and economic conditions, practices, and terminology. Recent copies of newspapers and newsmagazines should be used in class, including both the popular press and publications devoted to economic reportage. Audio-visual material depicting modern life and business practices should be used whenever possible. Videotape and videodisc technology facilitate this process of demonstrating the living language. Similarly, audiotape programs are beneficial if they include appropriate situations and sounds typically encountered in the host environment. Finally, since business students are generally familiar with computers, the instructor may want to explore using, as a supplement, one of the many self-instructional language learning programs available as software packages for microcomputers.

Another adaptation concerns conversational elements of foreign language courses. Managers must often make oral presentations to small groups in the work setting and, less frequently, engage in formal public speaking. Conversational practice in the foreign language should, therefore, include situations involving communication with groups in the target language. As part of this training, the business student needs to learn about appropriate formalities and protocol for such occasions.

2. Cross-cultural awareness

As mentioned previously, business students must learn the importance of establishing and maintaining rapport with associates and customers from other cultural backgrounds. Similarly, tools of cross-cultural analysis are productive in assessing market potential and in planning strategy to achieve organizational objectives in foreign environments.

The social sciences are rich in contributions in the cross-cultural field. For example, faculty from anthropology, psychology, and sociology can be tapped to discuss such essential intercultural concepts as contrasts among cultures, ethnocentrism, and the adjustment syndrome of "culture shock". Also, the roots and development of current conditions in economic and socio-political systems (which are themselves reflective of cultural patterns) can be interpreted by historians, geographers, economists, political scientists, and others. Business schools should avoid becoming insulated from the balance of the university. By using available resources from the key underlying disciplines of the social sciences to aid in internationalization, business programs can minimize the faculty development strain on their own staffs while integrating the liberal arts areas in appropriate ways into the professional school.

Cross-cultural understanding can be developed through a variety of techniques, most of which entail careful, close scrutiny of the characteristics of other societies. Students are encouraged to gain a more sympathetic appreciation for alternate ways of life. In this process, business students should be exposed not only to the constituent elements of modern-day cultures, but also to their manifestations in the workplace (i.e., "corporate culture").

3. "Mainstreaming" international dimensions

While some business schools have developed a single required course in international business, others have chosen to incorporate worldwide dimensions in multiple areas of their curriculum (e.g., in the core "common body of knowledge" fields). Both alternatives will be more effective if faculty members are committed to internationalization of course content. To achieve this goal efficiently, university administrators must provide positive faculty development incentives. Assuming that such conditions are present, there are a number of strategies from which faculty may choose to enhance internationalization in curriculum planning.

First, regardless of the subdiscipline involved, a comparative management approach may be taken. Thus, accounting practices in the Federal Republic of Germany may be compared with those in Great Britain; or distribution channels in Japan may be contrasted with those in North America. Such similarities and differences highlight again for students the interdependence of nations in economic affairs, as well as the importance of overcoming managerial inertia in order to be able to adapt to changing conditions. One means of developing materials with such a comparative approach is for researchers from different countries to write jointly-authored texts.

Second, course syllabi should be revised to ensure that international issues are addressed in each section of the course. By means of the inclusion of examples and illustrations of current business practices, perhaps further supplemented by modules or case studies, the course can readily incorporate a worldwide dimension throughout its structure.

Authors and textbook editors should be careful to incorporate footnotes and other citations that would refer students to additional source material with an international orientation.

4. Additional pedagogical approaches

Internationalization may be stimulated by the application of a thematic focus, such as an area studies approach. Thus, a geographic segmentation may serve to identify a particular region or grouping of nations (e.g., the European Economic Community) upon which the full attention of all international aspects of the business school curriculum would be directed for a period of time. For example, a school might designate a two term "Year of China", during which special public lectures could be offered (both by university faculty and selected visiting scholars), culturally appropriate social events would take place and, as much as possible, coursework would take on some of the flavor of the Chinese experience through examples and illustrations.

A focused approach facilitates more intensive study of international dimensions of business in that it permits greater specificity. For example, using area studies methods, students can explore one nation or region in depth, learning how to monitor the business environment and considering the strategic and operational implications for management in that locale. Again, there is a transference effect in that the careful examination of the conditions and cultural patterns of other nations can sharpen the student's ability to identify problems and opportunities in the domestic economy as well as abroad.

Guest lecturers, long a source of supplementary enrichment for business courses, are particularly pertinent to the quest for internationalization. For example, executives of companies which have

been involved in foreign trade can enliven class discussion and serve as a sounding board for students contemplating international careers. Others whose visiting contributions could be valuable include government officials, representatives of foreign trade missions, and members of official international organizations. The utility of language study could be addressed by the example of people who have been successful in applying foreign language in their business activities. The business school may find it productive, in fact, to invite prominent individuals such as those mentioned above to constitute an advisory board for international programs. Their suggestions may be helpful in curriculum design and for programmatic development through fundraising.

Greater understanding of international business can be heightened by offering students carefully designed and monitored foreign study travel opportunities. If such experiences take place after completion of related coursework, students will be able to test and observe firsthand some of the notions discussed in class. Furthermore, the process of acculturation may move more smoothly since students will have gained greater sensitivity to cultural differences through their studies prior to departure.

The internship provides a powerful laboratory for student transference of classroom learning into a working environment. Thus, an international internship could serve well as a "capstone" experience for those students with a serious commitment to the field of international business. The university may well benefit as well, as the ongoing network of linkages involved with internships can be used to share ideas, techniques, materials, and could possibly yield opportunities for faculty development and consulting activity.

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